

EDUCATION, WORKFORCE, AND INCOME SECURITY

An educated citizenry and a productive workforce are keys to the continued vitality of our democratic society and the vigor of our community. To this end, the government spends billions on programs aimed at fostering the development and education of our children and protecting this vulnerable population. Billions of dollars are also directed at providing training for our workers, helping adults not in the workforce (including those on welfare, the unemployed, and the disabled) enhance their skills and obtain employment, and protecting workers from employment-related and physical hazards. Significant resources are also devoted to providing Social Security and pension benefits to our nation's retirees. Together, these programs account for over 40 percent of federal spending and touch the lives of virtually every American. Education, Workforce, and Income Security (EWIS) assists the Congress by examining whether these programs are being efficiently and effectively implemented.

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DESCRIPTION OF

our work

The work of our team includes oversight of related programs within the following federal departments and agencies: Department of Agriculture (food and nutrition programs), Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services (non-health programs), Department of Labor, Social Security Administration, and Department of Veterans Affairs (non-health programs). Our staff are located in Washington, D.C., and in several field offices across the country, including Boston, Seattle, and San Francisco.

We analyze the efficiency and effectiveness of programs designed to

- ensure that our nation's children are well-educated, cared for, and raised in safe, stable homes;
- foster a well-educated, skilled workforce and improve workplace protections for employees without excessively burdening employers; and
- maintain adequate retirement benefits for current and future retirees.

IMPACT OF

our work

Our work has led to improved operations at several departments and agencies and led to improvements in education, workforce, disability, and retirement income programs. For example, when we found accountability lacking in the \$8 billion Title I program intended to meet the needs of economically and educationally disadvantaged students, we recommended that the Department of Education help states improve the quality of assessment data to better determine whether the Title I program is effective and whether students are making educational progress.

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We have also identified opportunities to save millions of taxpayer dollars by better ensuring that benefit payments are provided only to those eligible. When we reported, for example, that the Social Security Administration's inattention to verifying recipients' eligibility for the Supplemental Security Income program had contributed to benefit overpayments, the agency developed a "payment safeguard strategy" that enabled it to collect and prevent over \$597 million more in overpayments in fiscal year 1999 as compared with the previous year.

Our work has also played a significant role in helping policymakers assess options for restructuring and reforming major government programs and policies. In examining the long-term solvency problem facing the Social Security program, for example, we developed and applied criteria for evaluating Social Security reform proposals. These criteria provide a clear and objective analytical framework that the Congress, the administration, and the public can use in evaluating legislative reforms. Policymakers also use our work extensively to examine workforce issues, including the "white collar" provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act; the use of, and workplace protections provided to, contingent workers; and the increase in the use of skilled foreign workers to temporarily fill skilled worker shortages.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT and *future projects*

- Assess the District of Columbia's child welfare system reform efforts
- Identify ways to improve the delivery of child nutrition program benefits
- Examine commercial activities in schools
- Analyze direct student loan default rates
- Examine the role of state automated systems in helping families move from welfare to work
- Assess the availability of unemployment insurance for low-wage workers, including former welfare recipients
- Determine promising approaches to integrate employment and training services under the Workforce Investment Act
- Examine OSHA inspections at establishments with labor unrest
- Assess solvency, benefit adequacy, and other effects of proposals to reform social security
- Identify and analyze key practices of disability programs in the private sector and in countries that assist people with severe disabilities to return to work
- Analyze the uses of Social Security numbers and existing safeguards to prevent their unauthorized disclosure
- Analyze the effects of cash balance pension plans on retirement income adequacy